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## POSITION PAPER

### ON

# COMMUNITY EDUCATION

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Position paper on community education.



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ED ARGENBRIGHT, SUPERINTENDENT  
HELENA, MONTANA 59620

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## **Foreword**

The Office of Public Instruction has always provided support and encouragement to the public schools of Montana. It is time to re-establish an important goal for this office: a commitment to the community as a whole.

The school and community reinforce each other in teaching about life and about living with social change. Children learn from all life experiences, and certainly we must acknowledge the community as a vital factor in the educational process.

This paper presents a policy which encourages schools and communities to become partners in providing for the education and well-being of citizens.

Ed Argenbright  
State Superintendent



## **Statement of Philosophy**

Community education is based on the premise that the community is educational and that education is the preparation of an individual to live in society. Community education is defined as a partnership among the schools, citizens and community organizations for the purpose of using local resources to meet the social, cultural and educational needs of all community members. The public thus determines how best to use its resources. The logical function of the school in this process is to assist in resource identification and program planning. As a public facility, the school may be used to its fullest extent for community purposes. As an educational institution, the school is responsive to the educational needs of the community as a whole. Montana schools are truly "community schools."

## **History of Community Education in Montana**

Community education is not a new concept in Montana. From early times, the school has been the center of community activities such as civic projects and social gatherings. The school was also a gathering place for citizens where many of the decisions affecting the community were made. This is still true today. Our rural state enjoys a sense of community lacking in large metropolitan American cities.

Constitutionally, our system of education is pledged to develop the full educational potential of each person in the state. It is this responsibility to provide a quality education to meet the needs of our citizens that is the foundation of the community education philosophy.

In February 1977, the Board of Public Education issued the following resolution to support the concept of community education:

WHEREAS public schools are owned and maintained by the people and most often represent the largest single investment of tax money in a community, and

WHEREAS schools are most often strategically located in communities, and possess facilities and equipment which are adaptable for broader community use, and

WHEREAS the traditional use of schools for the purpose of educating young people six to eight hours a day, five days a week, thirty-six weeks a year does not realize the full potential usage of these important facilities for the good of the larger community, and

WHEREAS the problems facing community members today as they attempt to adjust to a changing society are so great that no one agency, organization or institution can continue to operate independently of the other, and

WHEREAS no single coordinated strategy for the development and utilization of community resources presently exists, and

WHEREAS the philosophy of community education provides that vehicle by expanding the traditional role of the school from that of a formal learning center for the young people to a community center which provides a lifelong learning opportunity to all segments of the population on a schedule that is virtually around the clock, around the year.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Public Education of the state of Montana extends its support for the development and expansion of the community education process which encourages the development of a comprehensive delivery system, based on local citizen involvement, greater utilization of school-community facilities and resources, interagency coordination and improved school-

community relations in order to provide for the educational, recreational, social and cultural needs of all community members.

In its *Standards for Accreditation of Montana Schools*, the Board of Public Education recommends that a school district's philosophy include the community education process. It further urges schools to take advantage of all appropriate educational resources within the community to assure that the educational program for each student is related to the student's needs and relevant to life within the community.

## **Office of Public Instruction Goals**

The educational goals of the Office of Public Instruction provide the framework for state leadership in the development of community education. The Superintendent of Public Instruction and staff will:

1. Serve the communities of Montana by helping them attain their educational goals and objectives.
2. Assist in the development of programs that will contribute to the maximum human potential of each person.
3. Provide educational leadership stressing basic skills necessary to compete in the market place as well as in contemporary society.
4. Encourage cooperation between levels of government, agencies representing various services, community civic service, private sector businesses, and unions etc. Schools must be part of the totality of these community efforts.
5. Encourage public participation in state and local educational decisions.

6. Keep citizens informed of advances in educational technology and methodology.
7. Encourage local initiative and creativity in exploring options for responding to the social and educational needs of community members.
8. Develop a comprehensive system for meeting Montana educational curricular needs for the purpose of providing appropriate assistance and guidance to Montana communities.

## **The Community School**

A community school is any school which serves as a center for the community or neighborhood activities. As a publicly owned facility, the school is most effective when it fully serves the people who support it. A school cannot provide everything an individual needs, nor can any single institution; but together the people and organizations in a community can plan the most effective use of all available resources.

The Office of Public Instruction has adopted the position that a community school is a wise use of resources and may be used:

1. For the benefit of all citizens.
2. To assist administratively in the development and operation of community education programs designed to meet the needs of the community for educational, social, and cultural opportunities.
3. To enhance the program of elementary and secondary school instruction by taking advantage of all appropriate educational resources within, and available to, the community.



4. To cooperate as an active partner with business, industry, local government and civic groups in order to solve individual and community problems.

## **Implementation of Community Education**

Implementing community education is not an extravagant experiment in a new educational philosophy. In fact, its principles are so sound and logical that most Montana schools routinely incorporate many of them. The manifestations of community education are as varied as the personalities and interests of the people in each community. The common denominator is a system of community self-improvement based on public involvement and cooperation.

The following suggestions for putting community education principles into practice are intended to be open-ended and non-restrictive in order to encourage implementation based on the uniqueness of every community.

1. *Involvement in the K-12 program:* assist teachers by identifying community resource people, by organizing a volunteer program, by making or donating teaching materials and by facilitating numerous contacts between the school, home and the community. Provide academic credit for community service and work-study projects.
2. *Programs for adults:* structure credit or enrichment classes, workshops, senior citizen activities, sports and recreation, performances, music or drama groups.
3. *Additional programs for youth:* design supplementary enrichment programs for youth as community needs dictate.

4. *Special projects:* contribute to special community projects in cooperation with public agencies and private organizations.
5. *Community services:* encourage cooperation between the schools and the providers of such services as health care, counseling, law enforcement, and vocational rehabilitation; distribute conservation, energy, and other relevant public information; sponsor programs in cooperation with local government or community service agencies.
6. *Public relations:* strengthen school-community communications by publicizing information about school and community activities.
7. *Use of facilities:* make available within local policies the resources of the school, recognizing the school as a primary community asset for all citizens.

## **Results of Community Education**

The Office of Public Instruction believes that a cooperative effort between schools and community will result in conditions of quality educational efforts, maximizing the potential of our schools as community resources. Improved school community relations will benefit the entire community and our democratic approach to government.



